

CHAPTER 5

Practices of support for children with autism in kindergarten: Exploring the “sayings” of teachers

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ABSTRACT

Our study explores teachers’ sayings about their practices of supporting participation for children with autism. We consider their sayings in the light of the theory of “practice architectures”. In three focus group interviews, teachers in two Norwegian and one English kindergarten discussed videoed examples of their practice. Analysis disclosed overlapping and distinct aspects of their practice. Their sayings were interpreted as disclosing some features of the architecture of their practice that supported or undermined the “relatings” of children with autism, as they are conceived in the theory of practice architectures. Findings suggests that the participation of children with autism is promoted when the “practice architecture” allows teachers to support their “relatings” and to develop a common practice with shared priorities and mutual support.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In this study, we aim to explore teachers’ sayings in relation to their practices of supporting participation for children with autism. In three focus groups

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interviews, teachers in two Norwegian and one English kindergarten discussed videoed examples of their practice. The goal of the research is to elucidate how their sayings might represent enabling or constraining conditions for their practice. To pursue this goal, the guiding question for the research is: What do the teachers' sayings disclose about their practices of support for children with autism? For this purpose, we draw upon the theory of "practice architectures" (Kemmis et al., 2014), within which professional educational practices unfold. We perceive a practice as a socially established cooperative human activity, where sayings, doings and relatings cohere in a distinctive project (Kemmis et al., 2014). The actions and activities taking place ("doings") are seen as relevant ideas arranged in characteristic discourses ('sayings'), where people and objects involved follow characteristic patterns of relationships ("relatings"). Supporting children with autism in kindergarten is thus a practice, with the perceptions of teachers understood as a constituent part of the practice. In line with the theory of Kemmis et al. (2014) we refer to teachers' perceptions as "sayings" in this chapter.

The context for kindergarten teachers' practices of support for children with autism

Teachers' practices of support for participation take place in the context of an international commitment to upholding children's rights to social participation. The kindergartens in this study are situated in Norway and England, countries that are committed to the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994) and to the UN's convention on children's rights (United Nations, 1989). This specifies that all children with SEN are entitled to be included in a mainstream school that is pedagogically able to meet their needs. The school should focus on creating an environment where individuals experience wellbeing and receive opportunities to participate in kindergarten life, and influence aspects of their lives to the extent possible (Cohen, 2006; Jordan, 2008). In both countries, laws and curriculums regulate the content of kindergartens. The Norwegian curriculum "Framework Plan for Kindergartens" (2011) focuses on children's participation and requires that adults' attitudes, knowledge and abilities support children towards active participation (Wagner & Einarsdottir, 2006). The English statutory framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Department for Education, 2014) has a greater focus on children's learning of pre-academic skills (Moss, 2007), and assumes an increasing

focus on activities led by adults (Department for Education, 2014). However, how the educational rights of children with autism are put into practice in either framework will rest largely, according to previous research, upon how teachers perceive their role in supporting children's participation.

Children diagnosed with autism have pervasive challenges with language, communication and social interaction (World Health Organization, 1999). The other defining features of autism include repetitive behaviors, special interests and sensory sensitivities (Neil, Olsson & Pellicano, 2016). These features can make participation in relationships challenging, and impact upon the children's capacity to participate in everyday kindergarten life (Locke et al., 2015; Memari et al., 2015; WHO, 1999). Their participation seems to depend largely upon how teachers adapt environments to accommodate them (Humphrey & Symes, 2013). How teachers conceive of their interaction with the children influences how they form their supportive practices (Emam & Farrell, 2009; Robertson, Chamberlain & Kasari, 2003). According to previous research, teachers working with children with special educational needs (SEN), tend to focus on the difficulties children present, rather than on developing supportive practices to enable participation (Ainscow, 1997). In addition, children's autistic traits seem to challenge the teacher-child interaction (Emam & Farrell, 2009; Glashan, Mackay & Grieve, 2004). These factors might lead to uncertainty about how to adapt the environment (Barnard, Broach, Potter & Prior, 2002; Barnard, Harvey, Prior & Potter, 2000). Yet successful inclusion for children with SEN seems to require that teachers feel self-efficacy, that is, belief that their support can affect children's development positively (Hegarty, 1997; Ruble, Usher & McGrew, 2011). Research regarding teachers' experiences of supporting children with autism in kindergarten is not extensive (Scheuermann, Webber, Boutot & Goodwin, 2003; Simpson, 2003; Syriopoulou-Delli, Cassimos, Tripsianis & Polychronopoulou, 2012). We hope to shed further light on the conditions of these practice by using the theory of "practice architectures" to explore the teachers' sayings in relation to their support to children with autism.

THEORY OF "PRACTICE ARCHITECTURES"

In sociocultural theory, learning has as its central defining characteristic a process which Lave and Wenger (1991) call "legitimate peripheral participation". The theory draws attention to the point that learners participate in "communities

of practitioners” and that “the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation” in the sociocultural practice of a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). In this view, learning is necessarily interactional, involving the community as well as the person (Sjølie, 2014, p. 41). In the context of this chapter, the implication of this is that how far a child with autism becomes a participant depends largely on relationships with other people in the community.

Kemmis et al. (2014) claim that participants in communities encounter each other in intersubjective spaces, which are arranged in particular ways and structure social life. They conceptualized this as a “practice architecture”, consisting of three kinds of interwoven arrangements. The *cultural-discursive arrangements* enable or constrain how sayings are used in the social medium of language, for example determining the kind of language teachers in a kindergarten community can use in relation to their practices of support to children with autism. The *material-economic arrangements* enable and constrain how we can do things, in the medium of work and activity. This might refer in our context to how the physical environment of the kindergarten influences practices of support. The *social-political arrangements* exist in the dimension of social space; they influence how we can connect to each other in the social medium of power and solidarity and deal with relations to political entities. In our context, they might refer, for example, to the nature of relationships between teachers or between teachers and children in a kindergarten, or with relations to national curriculums for kindergartens. The three arrangements are densely interwoven, with each informing the other (Kemmis, 2009), so that they emerge and develop in relation to one another and continuously change through the dynamic interplay between the “individual and the social and the practice and the arrangement” (Sjølie, 2014, p. 46). These patterns of saying, doings and relatings give practices a characteristic form, which shapes and prefigures practice, enabling or constraining new interaction (Kemmis, 2009). The theory of practice architectures offers a way of theorising education that resists the view of education as a technical process, concerned with the “production” of things like “learning outcomes” (Kemmis et al., 2014).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Three kindergartens, each supporting a five-year-old child diagnosed with autism, were involved in the study. Two were based in Norway, one in England. The

cross-cultural aspect was not intended to compare across the countries but rather to access diverse practices and enable a broader discussion. This study is a part of a larger overarching collective case study¹ (Creswell, 2012), which aimed to explore kindergarten teachers' practices of inclusion and support to children with autism, using observational data. Three focus group interviews consisting of teachers and teaching assistants (all referred to as teachers) from each kindergarten were conducted following the observation period. Video observation clips was used to support focus group discussion. We aimed to access the shared understanding of practice rather than the perspectives of individuals, and the focus groups thus allowed us to elucidate the characteristic discourses ("sayings") of the teachers' practice (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001; Halkier, 2007).

In each focus group, participants included the person primarily responsible for the child with autism and the head of the kindergarten, with others selected by the head.

Participants watched video clips of their work with the child, selected from 6.5 hours of video observation data recorded in each kindergarten for the overarching study. Each focus group saw five video clips of observations made in their kindergarten. The video clips were selected because they showed interactions in three different scenarios: 1. a positive interaction between a teacher and the child, 2. a challenging interaction between a teacher and a child, and 3. the child with a peer, with a teacher present. Video clips lasted on average 4 minutes. Each clip was followed by the researcher asking: "What happened in this clip?" The researcher did not participate in the discussion, but asked questions for clarification if necessary. Each focus group lasted about 1½ hours. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts of teachers' sayings in response to the three scenarios were analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide for thematic analysis. Data relating to teachers' sayings about the "sayings", "doings" and "relatings" of their practice were extracted. Next, episodes of sayings were triangulated with the arrangements in the theory of "practice architectures" and the research question: What do the teachers' sayings disclose about their practices

1 More information about the overarching study and descriptions of the participating children and kindergarten contexts can be found in the papers of Olsen, Croydon, Jacobsen, and Pellicano (Manuscript in preparation) and Olsen, Croydon, Olson, Jacobsen, and Pellicano (Manuscript in preparation). Some observational data from that study is used here.

of support to children with autism? In the light of the understanding in the theory of practice architectures that learning is essentially interactional, we paid particular attention to sayings that we judged to be informative about relationships and interactions. Each kindergarten was treated as one analytic unit in the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

We will present findings from each kindergarten separately. First, in each case, we will briefly present details of the kindergarten contexts and the observed child with autism. Pseudonyms are used to preserve anonymity. A discussion of the teachers' sayings in response to the situations shown in the video clips follows.

Teachers' sayings in the focus group: Kindergarten 1

Kindergarten 1, located in Norway, had an explicit focus on "recognition of the child", and supporting children's play was the main target of their pedagogic action, in line with the Norwegian Framework Plan (2011). Teachers in Kindergarten 1 met regularly to discuss their practices of support. The observed child, Ole, had 13 hours of one-to-one teacher support based on eclectic methods. During the observation period, teachers gave support to Ole mostly during symbolic play, to facilitate his interactions with peers.

In Kindergarten 1, two teaching assistants, one special needs educator and two teachers participated in the focus group. The teachers' sayings focused on supporting play with peers, in line with their stated ethos. They talked about supporting Ole with minimal intrusion between him and his peers, for example, using questions to suggest to Ole how he might proceed with a game. This quotation is typical:

I took a quite passive role, because I noticed that play with a peer was ahead. I did not want to interfere, but I suppose I did when I started to ask questions about the game [...] when we notice that he is occupied in play, we don't disturb the game.

Teachers referred to Ole's need for supportive "signals" that might allow him to benefit from naturally occurring opportunities for play and interaction. The idea of support consisting of verbal interventions without physical intrusion was strongly supported by another teacher, who saw the "passive" role as "important",

“Your question perhaps initiated the game – and you continued to support his action with your comments.” The second teacher validated the actions of her colleague: “If you hadn’t asked these question, then perhaps he would have missed out on the invitation to join the game”. Further, the teachers refer to a pre-existing agreement regarding intervening: “When we notice that he is occupied in play, we don’t disturb the game”. These sayings suggest a common understanding of how to relate to Ole in their support: the agenda is to orient Ole’s attention toward the relationship with peers, rather than with themselves.

Teachers’ sayings referred to their observations of Ole beyond the interactions under discussion. They noted that that when they followed his initiative and mood, and developed the interaction from this basis, he became more attentive towards their interaction. One teacher reflected on changes in Ole’s independence in play: “Earlier he just did what the other children told him to do. Lately he has become more assertive and takes more initiatives; he decides more in the games”. They show awareness of development and change in Ole and relate the changes to desirable outcomes from the perspective of children’s rights to influence their environment: “It’s important to allow him to decide. That he feels what it is like to be able to influence and use his own will”. The teacher went on to relate this development to the intervention sessions:

When he is allowed to influence at the training session, when he gets to decide what to do and when to finish the session, he develops skills to influence, which he eventually uses in other situations, outside the training sessions.

In this case, activities in the intervention setting are construed in the light of the children’s rights agenda.

Teachers’ sayings showed conscious adaptations for Ole’s sensory sensitivities. They referred to arranging the physical environment to limit exposure to disturbing and distracting stimuli, mentioning for example, that the door to the room where Ole played had to be closed, and the number of playmates limited to allow him to be an active participant.

The sayings included references to collaborative work with other children and the importance of sharing information with them: “We have talked a lot about Ole in the group of children in his department, and especially the older

children know him well, and know that we all have to work together with him to teach him things". These sayings show their shared history of working on Ole's relationships with peers, which they assess as having contributed to building his status. Ole became easily distressed if many things happen simultaneously in the environment, and this could lead to situations where he became inflexible. To help him in these situations, they had agreed that if he got a bit distressed and had decided, for example, not to eat a sandwich with liver pate, he should be distracted rather than contradicted. One teacher said:

Sometimes I just give him the sandwich and say: 'here you go, shouldn't you eat this?', and then he sometimes forgets that he had refused to eat it. If we are alone, I can start to read a book, and say that he has to eat while I read, and then he can also forget that he had said no [...] It's important to move to focus on something else.

The sayings here imply an agreement not to try to exercise control, but to use other approaches to overcome barriers such as this example of refusal.

Summary of teachers' sayings in Kindergarten 1

The sayings of staff in kindergarten 1 reflect a practice of support characterized by following, observing the child closely and guiding his attention. They agree that minimally invasive support is important because peer play must be respected and promoted. They speak about exercising control over the conditions of play, rather than over the child and his behavior. These reflections could be characterized as responsive approaches, in line with children's rights (Bae, 2009; United Nations, 1989; UNESCO, 1994). The Norwegian Framework plan (2011) and its commitment to the human rights agenda was thus apparent in the kindergarten's strong ethos of supporting play and "recognizing the child". Teachers' sayings disclosed that this ethos permeated their practice, even within the intervention context. The consistency of teachers' purpose was evident, for example, in sayings disclosing a shared respect for interaction with peers ("when we notice that he is occupied in play, we don't disturb the game").

The social-political arrangement of teachers meeting regularly to reflect on practice was also apparent in references to agreed strategies for behavioural

incidents, that did not rely on controlling practices, and in the evidence of mutual support. Shared purpose and mutual support resulted in teachers' self-efficacy, which is known to affect children's development positively (Ruble et al., 2011).

Teachers' sayings in the focus group: Kindergarten 2

Kindergarten 2 was a "Forest kindergarten", a provision focusing on outdoor activity in which children spend several hours every day on tours of the wood.

The observed child, Lars, was granted 30 hours per week of special educational support. This consisted of approximately 2 hours every day following an EIBI program² (Eikeseth et al., 2007), delivered on a one-to-one basis by a teacher in the kindergarten. Teachers attended meetings with an autism specialist from a local hospital approximately twice a month to discuss the EIBI program. These meetings were attended only by the staff involved in the intervention. During the observation period, teachers were observed in interaction with Lars mostly during the tours of the wood, when they tried to engage him in different kinds of play.

For Kindergarten 2, two teachers participated in the focus group. They spoke about the difficulty of supporting Lars' engagement in play. Observing a clip where he was shown ignoring teachers' play initiatives, a teacher said: "we have tried to engage him in play in various ways, but he is unengaged in everything". By using the word "everything", the teachers seemed to dismiss the possibility of promoting his participation, and to have developed a shared understanding of Lars as a child "not able to be engaged". Their sayings implied that the child's characteristics, rather than particular conditions or contexts, determined his lack of engagement. In this way, they provided an example of how a practice might itself constrain the possibilities for a child's development (Gee, 2000).

They further perceived that interaction with Lars required the teacher to stay close to him and physically lead him. One teacher put it like this: "To achieve good contact with him, you have to hold him physically close – almost be physically around him", and, "if he wants to wriggle out, I can guide him physically back on the right track again". The teachers connected this practice to his autism, saying:

2 Early and Intensive Behavioral Intervention (EIBI), is a highly structured and prescriptive educational intervention based on applied behavioral analysis (ABA) for young children diagnosed with autism (Eikeseth, Smith, Jahr & Eldevik, 2007).

“he needs structure, for the environment to feel safe and predictable”. Their reflections around physically directing him did not consider how far such a practice might be compatible with respecting the child’s right to influence according to the UN convention on children’s rights and the Norwegian Framework plan for Kindergartens (2011). Indeed, their sayings outlined what might be considered a controlling approach (Bae, 2009), where the child is given limited access to influence the interaction.

In fact, the ethos of the forest kindergarten – prioritising free outdoor play – might be seen as problematic. The arrangement made it difficult to provide structure and predictability to Lars, and it was observed that he was least engaged in interaction during the forest periods (Olsen, Croydon, Olson, Jacobsen & Pellicano, Manuscript in preparation). In the teachers’ saying, no attention was given to the possibility of providing structure in these situations, and it seemed that this was not part of their practices of support.

Although the teachers’ saying in Kindergarten 2 did not give priority to allowing the child to influence, one video clip was interpreted by a teacher as showing a successful example of following the child’s initiative. The clip showed a sequence where Lars and a teacher played at scaring each other with toy animals. Lars was attentive and seemed to enjoy this game. A teacher commented that this resulted in more motivation to interact, because “he likes the action”, she commented.

The teachers also discuss the question of Lars’ status or reputation amongst peers. They mention that he has excellent drawing and letter skills as something they should show to the other children. However, their sayings revealed ambivalence about these skills, with an apparent focus on lack of ability:

Because he’s struggling with the things he’s struggling with, it’s important to have some trump card, things he is good at – to show the other children [...] It’s important that we remember to show the other children his skills, so that he doesn’t become the one who’s not able to do anything.

The teachers showed further ambivalence in their discussion of Lars’ behaviour when analysing how his preferences seemed to be unstable. They noted that if they pushed him to do or eat something, he could “totally freak out”. They pointed out several times the challenge of finding the balance: knowing when

to push and when to let go. One of the teachers said: “you have to pick your fights”, admitting that it was difficult to know which “fights” to pick.

The vocabulary in these sayings: “struggling”, “freaking out” and “picking fights” is quite intemperate and might be considered stigmatizing (Goffman, 1972). Possibly, it might reflect frustration resulting from the apparent lack of strategies to promote the child’s participation and agency in this practice. The allocation of significant resources to a specific time and place for intervention may also have operated to remove the focus of support away from events and opportunities occurring outside the EIBI context.

Summary of teachers’ sayings in Kindergarten 2

The sayings of teachers in Kindergarten 2 also showed links to the Norwegian Framework plan (2011), as teachers mostly targeted their support on facilitating play for the child with autism. However, teachers’ sayings featured a negative focus on autistic traits and an inclination towards controlling the child, which existed alongside their child-centered consideration of what might motivate the child to interact and how his reputation amongst peers might be safeguarded. Allocating significant teacher resources to the EIBI programme (Eikeseth et al., 2007), which occurred at a separate time and place, seems to have undermined teachers’ focus on supporting the child in kindergarten life beyond the program. This allocation of resources may also reflect uncertainty about the process of supporting the child outside that context. This may have resulted in a narrow view of how to relate to the child, which under-recognised his agency and ability to learn through participation in the community (Bae, 2009; Broderick, 2009). An additional challenge for these teachers was the amount of time devoted to unstructured activity in the Forest Kindergarten ethos. This arrangement clearly prefigured the practices of support for Kindergarten 2, reducing possibilities for teachers to use the structure of an activity to support the child’s participation (Guldberg, 2010). Teachers’ sayings in Kindergarten 2 were interpreted as showing the tension between these influences, the “recognising the child” agenda, the Forest Kindergarten ethos and the primacy given to the times, places and modes of the EIBI intervention. Teachers sayings showed reduced self-efficacy by their focus on the difficulties presented by autistic traits (Barnard et al., 2000), and their acceptance of controlling practices (Bae, 2009).

Teachers' sayings in the focus group: Kindergarten 3

Kindergarten 3, in England, was rated "Outstanding" by Ofsted³ (2015), a mark of their successful implementation of the EYFS curriculum (2014) and the documentation criteria set by Ofsted. The application of the observed child, Ben, for special needs provision was still pending, but a teacher had regular training sessions with him, based on eclectic methods. Teachers were planning to schedule meetings to discuss their support practices. In observation, teachers support to Ben was mostly observed in structured outdoor play and in table activities.

Three teachers participated in Focus Group 3, one of whom was male. Teachers' sayings clearly focused on what the child should learn, rather than focusing on how to support his participation. Teachers reviewed a clip showing teacher-child interaction during table activities. Ben had a strong interest in choosing pictures to print. Supporting him in this preference was questioned by teachers:

I think children have little advantage of going around printing. I mean, why? Ben involves himself in an activity which he loves [...] He needs to be stretched, but he is not stretched when he finds a picture on the computer and prints it out.

Their sayings were not directed toward discussing the quality of the teacher-child interactions that occur in relation to the activity, or the developmental function they might serve for Ben. The teachers' evaluated the activity as incompatible with achievement and progress in learning. The saying "He needs to be stretched" may derive from the EYFS focus on the attainment of early learning goals for children of this age (Moss, 2007). In other words, the concrete prescriptions of the EYFS create within the cultural-discursive arrangement a preoccupation with pursuing learning targets that tend to outweigh teachers' attention to "recognising the child".

The focus group then moved to discuss developments that they saw as important:

3 Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) (Ofsted, 2015), inspects kindergartens for quality of provision within the EYFS framework and publishes the rankings of all educational providers.

He was sitting at lunch time, and the adult served him whatever it was, and Ben looked at her and said: 'I'm so disappointed'. I mean, that kind of conversation, that's what I think is much more interesting. He is really expressing what he feels [...] He is sharing his thinking.

Although teachers' sayings include references to the significance of the child developing shared thinking and expressing emotions, they do not refer to practices or means of developing practices that might support or promote this development.

Teachers talked about the value of positive peer interaction, showing positive evaluations of the child in this connection:

Tim actually seeks Ben's company. [Ben] is really lucky, he's got someone that he likes and who likes him [...]. [Ben] is usually moving around all the time. It was nice see him sat, relaxed [...] Did you hear what Tim said to Ben: 'You're here, so happy to see you' [...] They had a joint engagement, he was responding to Tim's interaction, he was giving eye contact [...] They were talking about different things but that didn't matter.

They then suggested that they should work to create more spaces for Ben to interact with peers, but their further discussion, detailed below, reveals why this might be difficult to achieve.

Speaking about that Ben's interaction with other children occasionally could be difficult for him to handle, teachers suggested that they should teach Ben skills and language to enable him to be more assertive in interaction with peers. However, their sayings reveal a focus on what they thought they should do, but not on how they might do it. They talked about the dynamics of these interactions, which were difficult to pick up because of the way that their attention was allocated. The kindergarten is organized so that most of the staff have responsibility for a specified activity (for example, for table activities or trampolining), and for children when they opt into that activity. This arrangement diverts teachers from following interactions happening between children not engaged in the planned activities. When Ben became angry or sad, teachers perceived the situation as difficult to handle, in part because they did not have an

overview of what had occurred: “You think that he is involved if he is occupied with others [...] Sometimes it’s quite difficult to see these children and make sure that they are included at all time. These things [negative interactions], kind of happen”.

They acknowledged that such events had further negative consequences in influencing their perception of Ben: “We still somehow think of him as a difficult child [...] We handle these situations based on what might have happened here [...] We are acting on history [...] he has moved on, but we still carry the old Ben with us”. The teachers’ identified constraints on their understanding arising from their limited attention to interactions. They also saw how “history” – their initial appraisal of the child – was continuing to shape their shared understanding of him, making them see his behavior in terms of “being difficult”. A significant factor contributing to the persistence of “history” was the allocation of their attention to activities rather than the dynamics of interactions with peers. It was notable that the sayings of these teachers articulated issues that they felt needed to be changed. However, because they were not meeting to discuss their practices, they were not resolving these issues but acting on “history”. This assumption was further confirmed by their sayings when reviewing a clip showing Ben with teachers. When other children arrived, the potential for interaction offered by their presence was ignored by the teachers: “We forget that there are other children, and that it is more important that he has interactions with other children”. In this example, too, the teaching priorities of the kindergarten – the arrangement in which teachers were allocated to supervise activities – contributed to limiting teachers’ ability to support peer-interaction for the child with autism.

Summary of teachers’ sayings in Kindergarten 3

Overall in Kindergarten 3, teachers’ sayings suggested tension between the technical and prescriptive priorities of the English pre-school system (Moss, 2007), which prevail in the arrangements of the kindergarten, and teachers’ knowledge of the needs of the child with autism. Their sayings were related to the focus in the English context on pursuing early learning goals. Teachers’ sayings indicated ways in which awareness of these goals diverted their attention from the significance of following the child’s preferences, as conceived in

the discourse on children's rights, and from the importance of focusing on his interactions, as required for supporting a child with autism (Guldberg, 2010). It was perhaps significant that sayings in this kindergarten referred to what they thought they *should* do – for example, they should pay more attention to interactions with peers, but currently were not doing so. They also intended to schedule meetings for practice discussion, but these were not yet in place. A material-economic arrangement in this kindergarten in which staff were tied to the location of organised activities also had obvious disadvantages for the support of the child with autism. Teachers were less able to give attention to peer-to-peer interaction taking place beyond the range of their activity, although they were aware of the need to do so.

CONCLUSION

We have looked at what teachers said in relation to video clips showing their practices in relation to the child with autism in their care. The goal of the research was to elucidate how their sayings might represent enabling or constraining conditions for their practice. The guiding question for our exploration was: What do the teachers' sayings disclose about their practices of support for children with autism? We found that each kindergarten had a distinctive "sound of practice" (Sjølie, 2014, p. 100), with characteristic focuses and preferences, and we identified some of the ways that teachers' sayings were shaped by the architecture of their practice, and in turn how their sayings might shape and prefigure their practices of support.

The sayings of teachers in the three kindergartens disclosed that the "architecture" of their supportive practices was influenced by local social-political arrangements. We identified both enabling and constraining conditions for their practices in these areas. In Kindergarten 1, the kindergarten ethos; "recognition of the child", informed by the Norwegian Framework Plan, acted as an enabling condition for their practice. The kindergarten ethos shaped the way they talked about their practices, and constituted a positive context for their practice of support and "relatings" to the child. Another facilitating social-political arrangement was the practice of regular meetings to discuss support for the child. In Kindergarten 2 the sayings gave evidence of conflicting priorities in the Norwegian Framework Plan, the EIBI programme and the ethos of the

“Forest Kindergarten”, which constrained their practices. The tension between competing priorities was evident in their sayings in the negative focus on the child’s autistic traits. This focus contributed to limiting supportive practices and “relatings” to the child. In their sayings, the practice seemed not to be developed by their regularly meetings perhaps on account of the EIBI agenda. The meetings solely focused on adaptations of the EIBI program, and only staff involved in the intervention attended the meeting. We therefore assume that these meetings could contribute to further substantiate the revealed tension, and serve as a limiting condition for their practice of support. In Kindergarten 3, the focus on learning pre-academic skills, following the priorities in the EYFS (2014), seemed to influence strongly the discourse of the teachers, undermining their practice of support and “relatings” to the child. This social-political arrangement also seemed to influence a material-economic arrangement; the way that staff held responsibility for discrete activities, seemed to constitute a constraining condition for their supportive practice. A distinctive finding in the teachers’ sayings here, which gave their sayings a “sound of practice” quite different from the Norwegian examples, was the focus on what they should do, which they seemed not to be able to achieve. This focus might itself serve as a constraining condition, and could possibly relate to the lack of meetings to discuss ways to support the child.

There are limitations of this study. The small sample size is suited to theoretical discussion (Yin, 1994), but does not allow generalization. We have not focused on individual differences between the children with autism, which may have influenced teachers’ sayings. The selection of children and teachers is not gender balanced, and we do not provide details of the teachers’ educational background, nor their levels of experience with children with autism. Finally, the fact that participants were selected by the head may have biased our sample. However, we consider the presence of both the head and the teacher directly responsible for the child to be a strength, as their sayings are most likely to represent existing discourses in the kindergarten (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Our analysis of teachers’ sayings suggests that the participation of children with autism is promoted when the practice architecture allows teachers to support their “relatings” and to develop a common practice with shared priorities and mutual support. The findings substantiate the proposal that the concept of

“communities of practices” can be adapted to develop organizations that are more able to support children with autism (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). The concept directs attention towards developing kindergarten communities where teachers engage in shared and collaborative endeavors. Our analysis of sayings, suggests that a practice architecture that supports a unified and common focus may offer the best support for the “relatings” of children with autism. Further research exploring the sayings of greater numbers of teachers might reveal whether our findings can be generalized beyond this small sample.

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